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Making dreams, making relations: dreaming in Angami Naga society

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Many cultures, including the Nagas, give great importance to dreams as sources of divine knowledge, especially knowledge about the future. The anthropological study of dreams, which generally focuses on the interpretive practices that surround dream narration, can elucidate local notions of personhood, cosmology, and the myriad ways communities appeal to the supernatural when navigating everyday social problems. Such practices are especially heightened in contexts of political violence, as individuals and communities negotiate the anxieties of everyday uncertainty and unpredictability. A century ago, British administrator-ethnographer J.H. Hutton remarked that 'the Angamis have almost a science of dreaming', and this article considers Hutton's observations while ethnographically examining dream experience in the same communities a century later.

What then, is this soul or life...which goes and comes in sleep, trance and death?

E. B. Tylor 1960 [1881], 203

Introduction

In his seminal text *The Angami Nagas*, J. H. Hutton noted that 'of all forms of second sight, dreaming is the favourite and the best. The Angamis have almost a science of dreaming' (1921a, 246). He noted that unmarried women, for instance, consulted their dreams while deciding on a marriage partner. Her dream was called *mhonyü* (dream of betrothal), and upon waking, her close relatives would wait expectantly to hear her narration. Grandparents also consulted their dreams in choosing the name of a new grandchild; and daily reflection on dreams could convince a person to abstain from going

to the fields, from traveling, or from conducting any number of activities. Ignoring the dream was believed foolish, and could lead to illness or even calamity for the wider community. In addition to these everyday ordinary dreaming experiences, Hutton noted that various specialist practitioners used dreaming as a primary medium of divination. Professional 'dream-women', for example, used dreams to divine the outcome of hunting expeditions, business ventures, or other concerns proposed by a villager (1921a, 246). *Themumia*, or shamanic healers, used dreams as a medium when consulted for more serious matters such as in the case of drought, or a serious illness: '[The *Themumia*'s] powers' Hutton wrote, 'vary from merely dreaming dreams to the practice of genuine black magic' (1921a, 242). Others included *terhuope*, or women who in a dream-like trance channelled the voices of the dead. Finally, *tekhumia* (lit. 'persons in the shape of a tiger') would lie in a dream-like state, projecting their souls into great feline predators in the forest outside of the village. Able to see through a leopard or tiger's eyes, and control its movements, a *tekhumia* could hunt wild game sometimes miles from the village where his or her human body lay asleep (1921a, 244-247; see also Heneise 2016).

However, readers of Hutton's monograph are left to their own devices to make sense of, or indeed imagine, how this 'science of dreaming' works. How might this 'science' be applicable across ordinary and extraordinary dreaming, and how might it relate more broadly to Naga cosmology? Hutton's observations are certainly indicative of a system, although one is obliged to supplement them with those of analogous traditions. In this paper, I explore Naga dream culture by looking at contemporary Angami ideas about what dreams are, and how they are interpreted, as well as the extent to which the dream subject has agency to affect a dream plot's outcome. I supplement Hutton's data with my own ethnography (Hutton's notes date from 1912-1915 and my own are from 2012-2015), conducted among the same communities, thus also elucidating important continuities.

Anthropology of dreaming

The literature on dreams in anthropology is extensive if one considers all that has been studied ethnographically on the subject from the discipline's mid-1800s inception. E.B. Tylor, considered 'founder of cultural anthropology', wrote a great deal about dreams in conjunction with his theories about the origins of religion. For example, in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871) – written within the evolutionist mind-set of his time – he states that:

The evidence of visions corresponds with the evidence of dreams in their bearing on primitive theories of the soul, and the two classes of phenomena substantiate and supplement one another...That this soul should be looked on as surviving beyond death is a matter scarcely needing elaborate argument. Plain experience is there to teach it to every savage;

his friend or his enemy is dead, yet still in dream or open vision he sees the spectral form which is to his philosophy a real objective being, carrying personality as it carries likeness.

Tylor's work on dreams has remained largely obscure, although recent studies (especially Bulkeley: 2016), have sought to re-validate Tylor's ideas, particularly as they relate to experiences of the divine in indigenous religion. Tylor cannot be credited with igniting any kind of broad interest in dream research. That credit goes to Sigmund Freud, and particularly his *Interpretation of Dreams* published in 1900, which became very popular throughout Europe, and spurred the first major phase of anthropological research into dreaming (Poirier, 2003; Tedlock, 1987a). Freud's concepts of 'manifest' dream content ('meaningless' imagery and language as narrated by the dreamer) and 'latent' dream content (a dream's 'true' meaning, obtained only through an examination of the dreamer's past) are often used to distinguish raw dream reports from dream reports that have been psychoanalysed. Freud also suggested that certain dream 'types' were universal, in other words, manifest dream content, regardless of social or cultural setting, would have the same latent meanings. This method was tested in a truly cross-cultural way by C.G. Seligman, a disciple of Freud, who sought out Hutton for material on Naga dreams. Testing Freud's 'dream-types' theory in the broadest possible way, Seligman enlisted the help of hundreds of traveling missionaries, traders, and colonial workers, to collect dream reports from across the British colonies (Tedlock, 1987a: 20).

The direction that dream studies took, through most of the 20th century, followed dominant theories on the subject, seated as they were in western epistemological constructs. These were shaped by a long trajectory of historical processes that have gradually pushed dreams from the public into the private sphere, and increasingly demystified them into 'products of the mind' in the Cartesian tradition of collapsing body and mind (Poirier 2003). Mid-century in the United States, for example, wide popular interest in character traits, led some anthropologists to sieve through raw manifest dream content, pulled from large population samples, in search for clues linking dreams to personality (e.g. Sears 1948; Eggan, 1952; Dittmann and Moore, 1957; Griffith, Miyagi and Tago, 1958; O'Neill, 1965; Gregor, 1981). A similar trend took place within psychology (e.g. Hall, 1951; Hall and Van de Castle, 1966; Hall and Nordby, 1972; and Gregor, 1981). But collecting and isolating dreams from their communicative contexts fell under heavy scrutiny in the 'cultural turn' of the 1980s. Dreams apart from the interpretive spaces where they emerge was now acknowledged as problematic. There was, thus, renewed anthropological interest in studying the 'communicative' processes of dream narration (Tedlock et al, 1987). The explosion of ethnographic work, and subsequent publications on dreams in the last three decades¹, points to this now more

¹ For example: Bilu, 2000; Descola, 1989; Epstein, 1998; Ewing, 1994; Firth, 1934; Goulet, 1994; Gregor, 1981; Heijnen, 2005; Herr, 1981; Hollan, 1995; Jedrej & Shaw, 1992b; Kilborne, 1981; Kohn, 1995; Kracke, 1979, 1981, 1999, Lattas, 1993; LeVine, 1981; Lohmann, 2000, 2003d, 2007; Mageo, 2003;

accepted recognition that dreams are social acts, but also that there exists a ‘mutual causal interaction’ between society, cultural systems, and dreaming (Lohmann, 2007: 38). Turning now to our discussion of Naga dream culture, I will open with a few notes on context, followed by a discussion of Angami terms, ideas, and practices associated with dreams, and follow with an ethnographic discussion which I place in dialogue with Hutton’s observations. I then turn to the significance of dreams in social and political life today, particularly as they constitute new forms of knowledge that face clan and church scrutiny. I then conclude by proposing a broader research project into Naga dream traditions, and potentially among analogous traditions in the wider region.

A few notes on context

As stated above, this paper draws on fieldwork I conducted between 2012 and 2015 in Kohima, the administrative capital of India’s Nagaland state, and the centre of Angami cultural, political, and intellectual life. I was based in the village, and interacted mostly with a single clan, which I will call the *Meya* clan. Kohima is in fact two bodies: a five-hundred-year-old village of 15000, and a more recent ‘town’ of 250,000. The town resembles other Indian hill-stations in its hybridity of colonial planning and more improvisational post-colonial development, though at its centre lies the distinctive and poignant Kohima War Cemetery – a haunting reminder of the clash of world empires that took place here in 1944, over control of the only main route linking the Assam plain and thus the Indian subcontinent, with Burma and Southeast Asia. In the cemetery, 1420 Allied war dead are interred, and the names of a further 917 Sikh and Hindu soldiers, cremated per their traditions, are etched in a memorial wall. The 5000 or so Japanese war dead did not receive the same honour, though Japanese delegations have visited over the decades, seeking repatriation of identifiable remains.

Kohima’s living inhabitants compose an equally cosmopolitan populace, with all the Naga tribes and sub-tribes represented, often living there temporarily whilst employed in the services sector, or in the government administration, alongside sizeable non-Naga Indian, Tibetan and Nepali communities, in many cases settled in the region since British times. Kohima is also, of course, the epicentre of the Indo-Naga war - Asia’s most protracted conflict. The restrictions on visitors that in many respects isolated the Nagas from the outside world from the 1950s onwards, have been relaxed in recent years due to a de-escalation of the violence. This is largely the result of a ceasefire signed in 1997 between the Indian state and the Naga Socialist Council of Nagalim – Isaak Muivah (NSCN-IM), the largest of a dozen or so splinter groups that emerged after the breakdown of the original Naga nationalist movement in the 1970s. As the Indo-Naga conflict is discussed at greater length in other articles in this issue, and given the limited scope of

Stephen 1979, 1982, 1996; Stewart, 1997, 2003, 2004b; Strathern, 1989; Tedlock 1987c; Tumminia, 2002; and Weiner, 1986.

this paper, I will not discuss this further, though I reference the conflict when directly relevant to the discussion. Finally, it is important to note that, although Kohima village and Kohima town are contiguous in most respects, the discerning visitor soon becomes aware of their distinction. This is clearly tangible to non-clan residents, and particularly tenants, living within the traditional village boundary, and subject to often severe clan laws and restrictions.

The importance of context in relation to dreams will become clearer further in the paper. But first, I offer a brief overview of Angami dream culture, define a few important terms, and link this with Hutton's observations.

Angami dream culture

Angami dreams (*mho*) are experienced (and remembered) differently depending on levels of practice, interest, alertness (*rho rhü*), and 'giftedness' (*mhaphruo*) of the dreamer, though generally it is believed that dreams are revelatory for everyone. Dreamers can draw truths about the world from a spirit-mediated realm of knowledge. At a first level, dreams reveal signs that may be interpreted in the course of remembering and publicly narrating. It is incumbent upon the dreamer to remember their symbolic arrangement and to consult a memorised lexicon of meanings accrued through personal experience and through the shared experiences of others. In the event of an enigmatic or even disturbing dream, the dreamer will typically consult an elder, usually wise and skilled in dream interpretation. On the other hand dreams can be doorways into an expansive terrain that the dream-self temporarily cohabitates with a host of other entities – ancestor spirits (*u chie ruopfü*), and powerful deities (*terhuomia*), all of whom are conscious and may or may not chose to make an appearance or share knowledge with the dreamer. Hidden from most, this terrain can be seen by gifted dreamers with an unusual ability to 'wake up' while asleep, and can navigate its contours and interact with its entities. If there is an underpinning general logic to Angami dream experience it is that this realm of spirit-mediated knowledge parallels waking reality and thus is always present and potentially accessible. Traditional shamanic healer-diviners (*themumia*) operating at the margins of the community communicate with tutelary spirits and thus may access this spirit realm and its knowledge (cf. Joshi 2012, 127). Children and individuals traveling or hunting alone are believed to be susceptible to a form of spirit entrapment or 'forest song' in which, like the Greek sirens, spirits draw unsuspecting persons into the forest through enticing melodies to a point where they cross over into the spirit realm - a central theme in Angami folklore.² As spirit entities have foreknowledge of human reality, and dreamers can tap fragments of that foreknowledge, one can anticipate and attempt to affect the 'coming into being of the present' (Kracke 2003, 222).

² Here I am drawing on Easterine Kire's term for the phenomenon (2011, *Forest Song*, Kohima: Barkweaver Publications.)

If word spreads of a person having had a particularly unusual dream, the question is rarely ‘is the dream real or true?’ but usually ‘when will it happen?’ or perhaps ‘who is the dream about?’ Typically, however, dreams are of a more quotidian nature and may or may not yield any surprising information. In my field notes, it was typically married women in the village that shared their dreams, often with their daughters, nieces or other female relatives and close neighbours in the early hours of the morning. Although dreams are commonly shared openly, ominous dreams are shared with discretion. In the distant past, such dreams would only be told under the covering of the kitchen hearth so as not to be heard by spirits who might attempt to manipulate the outcome it portends. An elder skilled in interpretation might be consulted, but typically this would be done also under the elder’s hearth covering. This is a practice I have not seen first-hand, though the oldest generation still has memories of it. Nowadays, distressing dreams are brought to a local church to be prayed over. In extreme cases, prayer counsellors are consulted, and prayers of intercession are offered by a small gathering. A well-known prayer counsellor, often referred to as a ‘prophetess’ at the Baptist Revival Church, was regularly consulted about dreams before she died in 2013 just as I began my field work. Although I did not have an opportunity to meet her, numerous informants spoke of her prophetic dreams being shared publicly in church services (a practice one finds in many charismatic Christian churches throughout the state), with ministries being developed as a result of the messages gleaned in her dreams.

Whilst a spectrum of ‘types of dreams’ may be drawn up in our attempts at envisioning a system of Angami dreaming, two categories emerge. Most dream narratives highlight the symbolic nature of their experience, and these then require interpretation. The other main category, namely *mhaphruo* dreaming, involves greater self-consciousness while in the dream. In other words, the dreamer is aware of their own agency, and their ability to gain knowledge through interaction with other conscious entities. These categories are also consistent with Hutton’s own observations a century ago.

As already mentioned, Hutton corresponded and shared his observations with C.G. Seligman, the first anthropologist to engage in a broad systematic study of manifest dream content. Hutton shared two accounts with Seligman, and by examining them we can identify important continuities with Angami dreaming experience today.³

Hutton’s observations

In 1915 along a newly constructed road about 140 Kilometres northeast of Kohima, Hutton built an inspection bungalow near the village of Baimho. The villagers had warned him not to build on the proposed site, though it was conveniently situated on a

³ The archive is catalogued under Hutton, Ms. Box 3, 26, Pitt Rivers Museum Archive, Oxford, and available online at <http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/naga/record/r73000.html>

small mound with a good water supply. The Baimho villagers had used the site to perform sacrifices to the spirit of a man that had drowned in the Tizu river.

A few months after the bungalow was finished I went and stayed in it for some local business. I occupied the west bedroom and my night was spoilt by a horrifying nightmare in the course of which I saw a creature like a human child with a monstrous big head creeping across the floor; the principal feature of the dream was the quite unreasonable fear which I experienced and which caused me to perspire so freely (the weather was quite cool) that my pyjamas and sheets had to be dried in the sun the next day. I thought it was a bad, a very bad dream and put it down to having eaten the roe of some fish they caught and brought me from the river, and thought no more about it. A little later Mr Mills had occasion to come to Kohima, some 70 miles, to consult me about some matter, and in the course of his stay he asked me if I had ever had an unpleasant experience in any of the Mokokchung inspection bungalows. I mentioned a scorpion in the bathroom at Nankam, but he explained that he referred to psychic experiences. I said I thought not. He asked me 'not at Baimho?' To which I replied then that I had experienced the worst nightmare I remembered since my childhood there, but that was all. When I started to recount it he stopped me and went on. The only difference in our accounts seemed to be that whereas the creature with the big head that I had seen had unkempt hair, he had seen it bald – or it may have been the other way round. We agreed that we would tell no-one of this experience but would find excuses to send people to Baimho and find out later if they had such dreams.

Their first 'victim' was a man by the name of Meikeljohn of the Assam Forestry Department who was transferred to the Garo Hills and had stayed in the Baimho bungalow prior to leaving. Hutton asked if he had experienced anything unusual there, and he said he had not. Sometime later a second person, Dr N.L. Bor, also in the Forestry Department, left the Naga Hills to fill in for Meiklejohn in the Garo Hills – though Hutton and Mills had forgotten to ask him about Baimho. When Bor and Meikeljohn met, however,

Meiklejohn asked him whether he had been to 'the haunted bungalow' while in the Naga Hills. He replied that he supposed Baimho was meant. He had gone to sleep in a chair on the veranda after he had arrived, having walked some ten miles from his last halting place, but was so frightened by a dream that instead of sleeping at Baimho as planned he had packed up his kit again and walked on another twelve miles to the next bungalow the same afternoon.

In the text accompanying his detailed dream experience and subsequent experiment, Hutton also includes an excerpt detailing the use of Angami dream symbols and interpretations, namely:

to dream of being bitten by a tic, which cannot be pulled out is an omen of approaching death, while to dream of a man dressed entirely in new clothes is a sure premonition of the

death of the man thus seen. A curious instance of this came within the writer's own experience. He left Kohima for a tour in the Kezama villages on September 8th 1913. At the moment of leaving, his own interpreter, Zelucha of Jotsoma, came up to say that he was not feeling very well and would prefer to join later after two or three days, so another interpreter, Vise of Viswema, was taken in his place. Mao was reached on the 10th, Kezakenoma on the 11th, Razama on the 13th. At Razama, Zelucha was expected to arrive, but another interpreter, Solhu of Kezakenoma, came instead, saying that Zelucha was going to die. When asked how he could possibly say this, as Zelucha had been quite well a few days before and had not been really ill when Vise saw him, Vise said that he had dreamt of him on the night of the sleeping at Mao, and had seen him dressed entirely in new clothes. This, he said, left no doubt. The news of Zelucha's death reached camp at Tekhubama on September 16th.

Though Hutton only includes these accounts in the margins of his monograph, he is careful to be as precise as he can with the details of his experience. In other words, he leaves little doubt as to his own puzzlement concerning the agency of spirit entities on the dreamer, and indeed the predictive accuracy of dream-mediated divination. Perhaps more importantly, his accounts are consistent with contemporary observations among the same communities Hutton studied. To substantiate this claim, I now turn to my own observations. Here, I also discuss the importance of context and setting.

The animated landscapes of dreams

The centrality of spirit encounters, their inter-generational character, and the importance of the landscape in dream narratives, were especially impressed upon me in an initial interview with a software developer named Senyü⁴. Senyü often explained aspects of his dreams that many other informants left out, largely I think because he was a mentor in his own work, and accustomed to giving careful, clear explanations. My first interview with Senyü happened nearly a year into fieldwork, and at a critical point when I was exploring whether linkages existed between the many accounts I had recorded that emphasised dream symbols, on the one hand, and on the other hand the kinds of dream experiences that seemed to entail a different level of consciousness - out-of-body experiences, remote viewing, interacting with ancestral spirits, and sometimes traveling at-will across landscapes. Were these fundamentally different modes of experience? In a sense, Senyü's accounts brought these two fields (and my two field notebooks) together. He began with symbols and their often counter-intuitive interpretations (not atypical of dream symbols in cross-cultural dream research), and moved organically toward what seemed like the other extremity along a continuum – where he did not describe symbols as much as conversations and interactions, often with the spirits of his mother and grandmother, who sometimes advised him about actual difficulties he was experiencing

⁴ Senyü's real name and profession have been anonymised.

in daily life. His interaction with the spirits of the dead had real-life consequences, particularly on his health.

College-educated, single and in his mid-thirties, Senyü practically lived at his office, often sleeping the night while working tight deadlines. Buzzing with activity, the day I visited his work-place, all the computer stations were occupied, with fifteen or so employees from various parts of Nagaland busily shifting through symbols and icons on their screens, entering lines of code, and creating a cacophony of mouse-clicks. Senyü knelt by one of the younger female web developers sitting by the entrance, and in pencil marked out corrections on her printout - 'this line of code is separate so that this command is not obstructed'. A second co-worker waited patiently nearby for his turn. Minutes later as we sat down to talk, I asked him whether he thought codes in dreams had any significance. He seemed pleasantly surprised to hear me ask this, and immediately responded with a big 'yes'! When I asked him to elaborate, he began a conversation that lasted the rest of the day, of which I include only a few examples here. He began, as I said, with symbols:

If I see dogs it translates to relationships with girls, or something with the opposite sex. Snakes would translate to enemies. If I see meat, or see myself eating it means bad health. If I see ceilings it means prayer - I need to spend more time in contemplative prayer. If I see walls it has something to do with the future – challenges that will affect my future. If I see schools – schools are very important. When I see myself going back to school and studying or trying to give an exam, for the next one month there will be a test, and I have to be really prepared. If I see the police, these are about events in the next few days I should avoid. It might be a party, but whenever I see police in my dreams, if people call me to a party, I have to avoid it.

'Really? Even presently?' [me]

'Yes, even now'

'What happens if you ignore your dream?' [me again]

I'll go there and get too drunk, or I'll just mess up everything. And if I dream of our underground insurgents, it will be something that comes to me, like some situations that I can't avoid, it will come and hit me. If I see certain people, based on my reading of those people, it may not be exactly about that person, but someone similar. If I see friends that have passed over, it's because they have a warning, they have come to warn me.

Throughout this first meeting, Senyü described how his upbringing had a lot to do with his understanding and appreciation for dreams. He and his brother were raised by his mother in the Dimapur valley, 70 kilometres northwest of Kohima. Senyü recalled spending hours as children listening to their mother and family elders sharing their dreams: 'They were stories to us – like storybook fantasies, we loved to hear them'. Senyü's mother was a keen observer of messages that appeared to her in both her dreams and in waketime reverie. Senyü recalled that his mother enjoyed the companionship of the spirits of her dead mother and grandmother, and often conversed with them while

going about her daily routines. They were especially present in anxious times, and Senyü shared one especially poignant account that happened on the day he was born:

My mother never let me out of her sight when I was growing up. She never even allowed me to spend one night in Kohima. Even if we came up to Kohima, we had to go down again. My mother often received instruction in her dreams and visions. When I was born, I was declared stillborn. My mother's grandmother came into the hospital room in a vision, and said that I was not a stillborn and that she had to take care of me properly, and to never let me out of her sight. She then turned around and told the doctors that I was not stillborn.

This kind of intervention involving communication with dead relatives in dreams and reverie, accompanied Senyü and his brother throughout childhood and adolescence. Senyü described an instance in which the spirit of his mother came to his aid in a difficult situation he experienced only two years earlier – one in which he spent time contemplating death:

At times, I also get troubled, like when a friend passed away about two years back in a tragic accident – he was drowned in a river. His girlfriend came and told me that she was having a problem. I told her to pray and make sure she finds an... In the Catholic tradition, we call it intercession, and someone must intercede on behalf so that the guardian comes and takes you... But at that time, I started getting – not feeling well; as if I'm about to die or something. And then I realised that ... I even started posting on my Facebook updates about life and death at that time, because it was a very strong, overwhelming thing. And then one night my mother came and she was so angry in my dreams. And she said, 'never ever contemplate death and life like this. Your friend was in your house trying to disturb you and he had brought a lot of friends and they were waiting for you, but I chased them all away.'

One significant feature that appeared often in his narratives was the way dreams revealed the location of spiritual activity in the landscape – activity that would have been perhaps quite familiar in older times. In one account, Senyü illustrates the way developers often ignore the old laws, and with consequences only later understood in the context of a dream:

I recently went to Peren where they are cutting this new ground. I found that they had cut off a stream. And in Angami culture cutting off streams is a very big taboo. And that day I travelled there and saw them cutting off the stream and I went near the stream and I felt very uneasy – I had a very uneasy feeling. I am not sure what other people saw, but when I got home I felt very sick and when I finally fell asleep I only saw that place in my dreams, I prayed and only then I recovered.

In a further example, and reminding me of Hutton's bungalow experiment, Senyü described the re-appearance of a specific spirit haunting people's sleep in a specific place – in this case guests in his own home. He contextualises his account by describing the

old layout of Kohima - once known as the 'land of seven lakes' – which included a large stream near the present-day Kohima War Cemetery:

There is a river here in Kohima and there is supposedly a path where spirits travel and it comes across my house like this. In this house it also can get disturbing. The people who stay here – they start seeing someone with very hairy arms or something else – sometimes they see these spirits. This doesn't necessarily have anything to do with war or whatnot but it is a traditional path.

As we see in Senyü's dream narratives, dreams can often index important cultural constructions of space. These often relate to the terrains of power that direct and restrict movement in waketime reality. Dreams can certainly open avenues for creative agency in negotiating constraints (Kempf and Hermann 2003), but dream narratives can also draw attention to the choices and indeed liberties one might take that might not be easily reproduced in waketime reality. Given Kohima's war-torn landscape, reminding its inhabitants daily of being surrounded by unpredictable forces they have little power to effect, it is not surprising that context is often foregrounded in the dream narratives of my informants. As Senyü's experiences attest, these are not always in obvious ways. But capacities for action, or indeed 'agency' to effect or negotiate exogenous forces – whether deemed evil or good – is also a process that may be socially distributed, and in the following section I discuss how this is done in relation to dream sharing.

The social life of dreams

Like Senyü's dream accounts and his own observations, many of my Angami informants articulated the notion of an ancestral, supernatural, or even divine agency in dreams – a kind of power that dreamers sometimes can consciously negotiate or even resist in the context of the dream. With the strong influence of Christianity, this supernatural agency increasingly appears as either coming from God or Satan, and occasionally angels or saints.⁵ But what is consistent is the belief that the supernatural forces perceived in dreams have the potential to influence or 'bleed' into waketime reality. The process of dream narration among close kin, elders, a church counsellor, or neighbours, is understood to be a continuation of this process of acting on or negotiating this power, which, depending on its source, may inflict harm or bring blessing upon the dreamer. The physical effects the Baimho spirit had on Hutton and his 'victims' – causing him to sweat profusely, and frightening another so greatly as to force him to vacate the bungalow immediately; or the way Senyü fell ill while trying to deal with demands of the spirit of his drowned friend in his dream; are illustrative of how this 'influence' can cross over

⁵ Indeed, the influence of Christianity on the interpretation or meanings of Naga dreams and dreaming is a topic that is of great significance, and merits at least a full paper of its own. Alas, this is beyond the scope of this present discussion regarding Hutton's 'science of dreams'.

from the dream into waking reality. In all the cases where Hutton identifies dreaming in divination, particularly among professional practitioners, he recognises that, beyond a simply cognitive exchange, in the sense of translating symbols and sharing ‘information’, there is a power transference; a power that is understood to originate with the supernatural, that may be also apprehended, negotiated, plumped for, or defused, in the narrating process. Indeed, in this paper, I use ‘influence’ deliberately, as it describes this permeation, of portentous knowledge and supernatural agency, between social others in dreamtime and social others in waketime experience. We might say that there is an ongoing productive social dialectic in the act of waking from imagined into wakeful, enacted sociality, or as Minna Opas (2016) states, ‘dreams occupy an important place in the joint production and re-production of lifeworlds’ (Ibid., p. 247). Analogous to the Naga context, in her work among the Yine of Amazonian Peru, Opas states, that ‘In sharing their dreams with each other, the Yine attempted to ensure that the influence of the social others encountered in dreams would not leak uncontrollably into the sphere of normal daily existence, and so possibly have unwanted effects’ (p. 247). The ‘leakage’ could be controlled through the intervention of the dreamer in the act of narrating the dream. Indeed, as she states: ‘Telling others about one’s dreams was a way to control and protect one’s own human bodily condition and that of those around one. Nevertheless, these others were not merely passive bystanders but were also actively involved in these processes. This was apparent in Yine evangelicals’ dreaming and their experiences of God’s influence in their lives and bodies (pp. 247-248)’. Interestingly, Opas describes a belief among the Yine resembling Naga beliefs in the dangers of venturing to close to forests where powerful spirits can entrap human souls – particularly the weaker souls of small children, namely ‘Yine avoidance of entering the forest alone: they always went with a companion because it was thought that alone the risk of being influenced by the consubstantialising practices of other non-human beings was too great (Opas 2016, 247)’.

Concluding remarks

The privileged knowledge of premonitory dreaming is a subject of considerable interest to the Angamis and the Nagas more generally, and dreams are the most common mode through which revelatory knowledge is obtained – very often filtering through to dreamers with no special insight, although believed to be of consequence to the dreamer and his or her community. In this paper, I have described how ordinary dreams are interpreted based on community memory of symbolic meanings of dreams interpreted in the past. Based on this index of meanings, they judge the level of severity of the revelation, and communicate this knowledge to close kin, and if necessary to the clan. Unremarkable dreams are often quickly forgotten, or perhaps shared light-heartedly in conversation during morning chores. However, particularly cryptic, puzzling or troubling dreams are prayed on, or brought to a more experienced dreamer for

interpretive consultation. The process of narrating a dream alone is seen as a kind of ‘interference’ that can ‘plump for’ a desired blessing, on the one hand, and on the other, lessen or defuse the harmful effects of an undesirable dream. There are also individuals like Senyü that are considered particularly gifted – *mhaphruo* – who interpret with greater facility, and in a sense are able to consciously act and communicate in the midst of their dream experiences. As with Senyü, *mhaphruo* dreamers may receive knowledge directly from the spirits of dead relatives and other non-human entities with whom they interact, and sustain a deeper personal linkage with their dream experiences, as compared with the first category. Although we cannot observe the totality of a dream ‘system’, we can infer that these two modes of experience are part of one integrated whole. Indeed, it is the person’s own capacities that limit or accentuate their experiences in dreaming.

With the advent of Christianity and particularly its numerous charismatic variants, the cultivated practice of communicating dream-mediated knowledge has entered new ritual modalities and form new meanings. It also shows important continuities into the present of pre-Christian practices, likely preserved in the domestic practices not immediately scrutinised by the puritanical exigencies of the early American Baptist missionaries. In addition, Naga political and nationalist leaders have drawn on dream-mediated knowledge as they have sought to shape their political platforms, and nationalist agendas. In some instances, the knowledge obtained from dreams has informed daily strategies. One veteran combatant once shared with me that every company of Naga soldiers had at least one person that was a gifted dreamer. These would often wake from sleep with warnings not to proceed along a planned forest march to avoid possible ambush. Anecdotes like this are shared often during family meals, and the wonderment that surrounds dream-mediated knowledge, and especially knowledge about the future, sustains Naga popular fascination with dreams and dreaming today.

Finally, the aim of this article was to combine recent ethnographic material and archival material in substantiating Hutton’s claim with regards to an ‘Angami science of dreams’. I introduced several informants whose experiences serve as ideal-types – *mhoté* dreamers or dream experiences and *mhaphruo* dreamers and dream experiences – and thus indicate the breadth of dream experience in contemporary Angami society. In my research these two categories were helpful in mapping out the kinds of dream experiences most of my informants shared, and it became clear that personal circumstance, interest and the intensity of engagement with dreaming and communicating dreams translated into varying levels of expertise, or insight – regardless of any ‘gift’ they might have. These categories, placed as ideal-types along a continuum of experience form ontological dispositions from which one can explore the nexus between dream inspiration and experience on the one hand and revelatory diffusion in socio-cultural process on the other (Tonkinson 2003, 88). 🍌

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